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Columbia River Update

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Navigation

Increased river flows and water velocities may present potential hazards for commercial and recreational boaters in the Columbia and Snake river system.

Navigators, particularly cruise ships, tug-boat and barge operators are reporting difficulty maneuvering near John Day Dam because of high river velocities. At Ice Harbor Dam on the Snake River, barge operators are experiencing strong cross flow conditions at the downstream entrance to the lock. The Corps and other state and federal agencies involved in river operations, have agreed to experiment with adjusting the spill pattern next week at Ice Harbor to see if such changes will improve navigation without adversely affecting fish passage.

Flows and Reservoir Operations

Flows in the Lower Columbia, from McNary Dam to Portland are averaging about 470,000 cubic feet per second (cfs), far more than historic May flows of 287,000 cfs. As the basin's snowmelt occurs, river operators expect potential peak flows of up to 550,000 cfs. Bill Branch, Chief of Water Management Division in Portland, said the Corps is planning to hold the river at 550,000 cfs or less.

Reservoirs in the Columbia River Basin may begin filling sometime in the second or third week of May, depending on the weather forecast.

With the recent pickup in runoff and the requirements of the regional flood control operating plan, Grand Coulee has been drafting one foot a day and expects to reach its reservoir target elevation of 1208 to 1210 feet by Monday. Because the required releases are larger than powerhouse capacity, the excess flow is going over the spillway, resulting in higher-than-desired total dissolved gas levels (TDG).

In Idaho, the daily average for flows in the Lower Snake River through this weekend are

150,000 to 170,000 cfs. As snowmelt occurs, though, the River Forecast Center expects potential peak flows of 242,000 to 346,000 cfs.

Debris in the river system has also increased, which poses safety problems for recreationists, fishermen, commercial operators and fish migration. The debris is primarily from tributaries of the Snake River which have risen above flood stage.

Seasonal Volume Forecast

A wet April and continued snow accumulation at higher elevations contributed to a slightly elevated volume forecast for the month.

The River Forecast Center's Early Bird runoff volume forecasts at three key flood control points in the Columbia-Snake system for April to September show Grand Coulee at 130% of normal, up one percentage point from last month; The Dalles at 135% of normal, up one percentage point; and Lower Granite at 149% of normal, down one percentage point.

With 40 million acre feet of storage in the Columbia River system and 125 million acre feet of water expected to pass The Dalles Dam between April and August, the Corps has been readying storage projects throughout the system to be at minimum operating pool levels, ready to catch the runoff from the spring freshet, or snowmelt. Dams owned by the Bureau of Reclamation, Idaho Power Company and Canada provide about 75 percent of the flood control storage available.

Projected Flow/Spill Updates

Updated river flows and project operation data are available by calling the Corps Water Management hotline at **503-808-3989**.

Check out the Corps Water Management and Technical Management Team web pages and related web sites at

<http://www.npd-wc.usace.army.mil>